

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1794

C O N F I D E N T I A L SINGAPORE 0093

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OVIP

SUBJ: CODEL THURMOND-SCOTT: CALL ON PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN

YEW

1. I ACCOMPANIED SENATORS THURMOND AND SCOTT ON THEIR CALL ON PRIME MINISTER LEE, JANUARY 5. LEE WAS IN HIS USUAL PESSIMISTIC FRAME OF MIND, AGONIZING OVER THE DOWNTURN IN THE WORLD ECONOMY, AND THE DESPAIR HE SAID EXISTED IN JAPAN AND WESTERN EUROPE OVER THE ECONOMIC SITUATION. THE UNITED STATES SOMEHOW HAD TO PROVIDE THE LEADERSHIP AND DIRECTION WHICH COULD KEEP THE WESTERN WORLD FROM SLIPPING INTO DEPRESSION. HE THOUGHT THERE WAS LITTLE HOPE OF THE ARABS LOWERING OIL PRICES AND SAID CONSERVATION MEASURES AND DEVELOPMENT OF NEW ENERGY SOURCES WOULD BE TOO SLOW IN SHOWING RESULTS. WHEN SENATOR THURMOND CONGRATULATED PRIME MINISTER ON SINGAPORE'S ECONOMIC PROGRESS, LEE SAID THAT IT ALL TOOK PLACE BEFORE THE OIL PRICE RISE AND THAT SINGAPORE'S CURRENT ECONOMIC OUTLOOK WAS PRETTY BLEAK. BOTH SENATORS THURMOND AND SCOTT TOLD LEE THEY THOUGHT HE WAS OVERLY

PESSIMISTIC ABOUT THE OIL SITUATION AND THAT WITH COOPERATION OF ALL CONCERNED THERE WAS HOPE OF AVOIDING THE CALAMITOUS CONSEQUENCES THE PRIME MINISTER ENVISAGED.

2. THE PRIME MINISTER THEN REPEATED HIS STANDARD PESSIMISTIC ASSESSMENT OF THE OUTLOOK FOR INDOCHINA. HE SAID IT NOW LOOKS LIKE THE COMMUNISTS HAVE CAPTURED A PROVINCIAL CAPITAL (PHUOC BINH) AND WILL PROBABLY DECLARE IT THEIR CAPITAL AND SEEK INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION. HE THOUGHT THE BIG QUESTION WAS WHETHER THE U.S.

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CONGRESS WOULD CONTINUE TO PROVIDE SUFFICIENT ECONOMIC AND MILITARY

AID TO SOUTH VIETNAM AND REFERRED TO THE 50 PCT CUT IN THE AID

APPROPRIATION A SEVIDENCE OF A WEAKENING OF WILL AND DETERMINATION ON THE PART OF U.S. TO PROVIDE THE NECESSARY SUPPORT. HE THOUGHT THE CRITICAL POINT WOULD BE REACHED AT THE TIME OF THE 1976 U.S.

ELECTIONS AND FROM THEN ON HE THOUGHT THE PROSPECTS UNFOLDING

IN VIETNAM WOULD BE PRETTY BLEAK. THE U.S. NEEDED, HE SAID, TO REGAIN ITS BALANCE AND PERSPECTIVE AND TO UNDERSTAND ITS BASIC LONG TERM INTERESTS IN THIS PART OF THE WORLD. SENATOR THURMOND SAID THAT HE AGREED THAT SUFFICIENT SUPPORT SHOULD BE PROVIDED

VIETNAM AND THAT HE DIDN'T THINK THE PICTURE WITH RESPECT TO U.S. CONGRESSIONAL AND PUBLIC ATTITUDES WAS AS BAD AS THE PRIME MINISTER BELIEVED, SENATOR SCOTT SAID THAT HE FAVORED CONTINUED SUPPORT

FOR VIETNAM, BUT THAT THE U.S. COULD NOT CONTINUE TO CARRY THE BURDEN ALONE. HE THOUGHT EVERY FREEDOM-LOVING COUNTRY SHOULD MAKE SOME CONTRIBUTION -- PARTICULARLY COUNTRIES IN THIS REGION, INCLUDING SINGAPORE, WHICH HAVE THE GREATEST STAKE IN THE FUTURE OF VIETNAM -- TO DEMONSTRATE SUPPORT FOR VIETNAM. HE SAID SUCH CONTRIBUTIONS,

HOWEVER SMALL, WOULD HAVE A FAVORABLE IMPACT ON U.S. PUBLIC AND CONGRESSIONAL ATTITUDES AND HELP US SUSTAIN OUR EFFORT.

3. LEE SAID THAT EVEN AT THE HEIGHT OF INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT FOR VIETNAM SENATOR FULBRIGHT HAD BEEN SCORNFUL OF THE "TOKEN CONTRIBUTIONS"

OF OTHER COUNTRIES. THE TIME HAS PASSED, LEE THOUGHT, WHEN OTHER COUNTRIES COULD BE EXPECTED TO PROVIDE SUPPORT. IT REALLY DEPENDED ON WHAT THE U.S. WAS WILLING TO DO. SENATOR SCOTT REEMPHASIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND SUPPORT, BUT LEE WAS UNRESPONSIVE.

4. COMMENT: THERE WAS NOTHING NEW IN LEE'S REMARKS ALTHOUGH THE CONFIDENTIAL

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EMPHASIS HE PLACED ON ECONOMIC ISSUES WAS SOMEWHAT STRONGER THAN PREVIOUSLY WHICH REFLECTS THE INCREASED CONCERN HERE OVER WORLD ECONOMIC TRENDS AND THEIR IMPACT ON SINGAPORE. ALTHOUGH LEE IS WILLING PRIVATELY AND EVEN AT TIMES PUBLICLY TO EXPRESS OPPOSITION TO A COMMUNIST TAKE-OVER OF VIETNAM, HE IS UNWILLING TO PERMIT GOS TO ENGAGE IN ANY PRACTICAL ACTION ON THIS PROBLEM WHICH WOULD PUT SINGAPORE OUT IN FRONT OF ITS ASEAN NEIGHBORS AND EXPOSE IT TO ANY SERIOUS CRITICISM FROM NON-ALIGNED COUNTRIES.

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